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SUBJECT: DAS ROBINSON DISCUSSES ELECTIONS, EXTRADITION, AND
PATHWAYS IN EL SALVADOR

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) Summary: Deputy Assistant Secretary David Robinson visited El Salvador February 25-28, participated in the VIP delegation to honor Salvadoran troops that served in Iraq, and discussed the upcoming March 15 elections, public security, and Pathways to Prosperity with key Embassy contacts. Political analyst Salvador Samayoa told him that higher voter turnout would favor (center-right) ARENA, and expressed concern about both parties. Minister of Public Security and Justice Rene Figueroa told DAS Robinson that the pending extradition of a Salvadoran was stalled in the Supreme Court and hinted that a decision could be delayed until the next court session. Government officials also briefed DAS Robinson on their preparations for the upcoming Pathways to Prosperity ministerial that will be hosted by the Salvadorans. End Summary.

SAMAYOA SAYS HIGHER TURNOUT WILL FAVOR ARENA

2. (C) Political analyst Salvador Samayoa told DAS Robinson that he believes presidential candidates Avila and Funes are now effectively tied, and that higher voter turnout on election day will favor ARENA. He said that the FMLN brought out all their voters in the January election, and, while they won a plurality, it wasn't overwhelming. He said that it is unclear that (center-right) Christian Democrat Party (PDC) or (right-wing) National Conciliation Party (PCN) voters will turn to Avila, particularly since the PDC has groups within the party that have leaned to the left in the past, even though the leadership is conservative.

3. (C) If Samayoa said he does not expect lasting violence. He said he believes the best thing for the FMLN party structure would be for Funes to lose and Avila to govern. If the FMLN does win, they will face severe budgetary pressures, a slowing economy, and a difficult environment in which to govern. Samayoa said that he has known Funes for years, and Funes is not a communist. If Funes wins, Samayoa said that the model will be for Funes to control the ministries and positions responsible for running the economy, but that the party will want to oversee public security and education. Samayoa said that he sees foreign policy risks in a Funes administration, not because he will pursue anti-American policies, but that those who will expect to be in positions of responsibility are not "smart" in terms of foreign policy.

4. (C) If ARENA wins, Samayoa says that he fears that current President Saca will keep his hand in the till. He said that all ARENA governments have had corruption, but the scope of corruption in the final years of the Saca government has been stunning.

MERIDA AND EXTRADITION

15. (C) Minister of Public Security and Justice Rene Figueroa told DAS Robinson that extradition "had to happen" in the current case before the Salvadoran Supreme Court, but that the case was probably stalled because five of the 15 justices will be up for election soon. He hinted that the Embassy's efforts had caused a stir and started the finger-pointing about which justices were for and which were against. He made no prediction about when the case would be resolved, indicating that it may fall to the next court. He agreed that El Salvador becoming a haven for criminals was not in the country's interest.

16. (C) Figueroa said that although El Salvador has a Merida working group, transnational gangs and drug trafficking could undermine the country's institutions. He said they were a real threat to democracy, and needed to be addressed in a comprehensive manner. He noted that, the previous week, authorities had seized more weapons and were attempting to trace their origin. Figueroa said that he hoped for a quick renewal of the CSL agreement and a meeting between President Obama and President Saca in the near future.

PATHWAYS TO PROSPERITY

17. (C) DAS Robinson discussed the Pathways to Prosperity in the Americas initiative with Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and Ministry of Economy (MINEC) representatives. MFA was represented by Director of Economic Affairs Ricardo Flores and Director of Central American Economic Affairs Hector Eduardo Palucho. CAFTA Office Director Jorge Guzman represented MINEC. The GOES representatives said they are preparing for the next Pathways ministerial meeting, which the GOES will host. Guzman said that while they had proposed the April 28-29 dates for the meetings, they would be willing to shift the dates to accommodate Secretary Clinton's participation. DAS Robinson said there was strong support for the Pathways initiative, but no decision had been reached on who would represent the USG at the ministerial. The MFA and MINEC representatives said they had been reaching out to other Pathways countries to encourage their participation and concrete action proposals, and that they would host a planning meeting at the Inter-American Bank's Washington headquarters on March 3rd. They also sought high-level participation from the USG.

18. (SBU) The ceremony to honor Salvadoran soldiers and on other mil-to-mil matters raised during the visit of the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff will be reported separately.

19. (U) This message was cleared by DAS Robinson.
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